

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1 1. In a network environment comprising a plurality of user systems
2 coupled to a postage vendor system, the postage vendor system comprising a plurality of
3 server systems, a method of dispensing postage comprising:
4 associating a single license number assigned by a postal authority with the
5 postage vendor system;
6 at the postage vendor system:
7 receiving a first request from a first user system from the plurality of
8 user systems requesting purchase of a first stamp;
9 receiving a second request from a second user system from the
10 plurality of user systems requesting purchase of a second stamp;
11 in response to the first request, generating information for printing a
12 first indicium corresponding to the first stamp based upon the single license number
13 associated with the postage vendor system; and
14 in response to the second request, generating information for printing a
15 second indicium corresponding to the second stamp based upon the single license number
16 associated with the postage vendor system;
17 communicating the information for printing the first indicium from the postage
18 vendor system to the first user system; and
19 communicating the information for printing the second indicium from the
20 postage vendor system to the second user system.

1 2. The method of claim 1 further comprising printing the first indicium at
2 the first user system based upon the information for printing the first indicium received from
3 the postage vendor system.

1 3. The method of claim 2 wherein:
2 the first request includes information identifying a medium on which the first
3 indicium is to be printed;
4 generating the information for printing the first indicium corresponding to the
5 first stamp comprises:
6 validating the information identifying the medium on which the first
7 indicium is to be printed; and

generating the information for printing the first indicium only if the information identifying the medium on which the first indicium is to be printed is determined by the postage vendor system to be valid; and

printing the first indicium comprises printing the first indicium on the medium.

4. The method of claim 3 wherein the medium on which the first indicium is printed is a label and the information identifying the medium is a serial number associated with the label.

5. The method of claim 3 wherein the medium on which the first indicium is printed is a label from a sheet of labels and the information identifying the medium is a serial number associated with the sheet of labels.

6. The method of claim 2 wherein:
the first request includes information identifying a first user and credit-card information; and
generating the information for printing a first indicium corresponding to the first stamp comprises:
validating the information identifying the first user and the credit-card information; and
generating the information for printing the first indicium only if the information identifying the first user and the credit-card information is determined by the postage vendor system to be valid.

7. The method of claim 1 wherein generating the information for printing the first indicium comprises:
selecting a first server system from the plurality of server systems of the postage vendor system to generate the information for printing the first indicium; and
generating the information for printing the first indicium using the first server system.

8. The method of claim 7 wherein selecting the first server system from the plurality of server systems comprises:
storing, at the postal vendor system, a list of server systems which may be used to generate information for printing the first indicium; and

5 selecting the first server system from the list of server systems according to a
6 selection procedure.

1 9. The method of claim 8 wherein the selection procedure comprises a
2 round-robin selection procedure.

1 10. The method of claim 7 wherein generating the information for printing
2 the first indicium using the first server system comprises:

3 generating a digital signature using a cryptographic module associated with
4 the first server system; and

5 including the digital signature in the information for printing the first
6 indicium.

1 11. The method of claim 7 wherein generating the information for printing
2 the first indicium using the first server system comprises:

3 selecting a first postal security device (PSD) resource from a plurality of PSD
4 resources stored by the postage vendor system;

5 determining if funds associated with the first PSD resource are at least equal to
6 the value of the first stamp;

7 if it is determined that the funds associated with the first PSD resource are less
8 than the value of the first stamp, adding funds to the funds associated with the first PSD
9 resource; and

10 generating the information for printing the first indicium using the first PSD
11 resource.

1 12. The method of claim 7 wherein generating the information for printing
2 the first indicium using the first server system comprises:

3 selecting a first postal security device (PSD) resource from a plurality of PSD
4 resources stored by the postage vendor system;

5 decreasing a first value associated with the first PSD resource by a value of the
6 first stamp;

7 increasing a second value associated with the first PSD resource by the value
8 of the first stamp; and

9 generating the information for printing the first indicium using the first PSD
10 resource.

1 13. The method of claim 12 wherein generating the information for
2 printing the second indicium comprises:
3 selecting the first server system from the plurality of server systems of the
4 postage vendor system to generate the information for printing the second indicium;
5 selecting the first postal security device (PSD) resource for generating the
6 information for printing the second indicium;
7 decreasing the first value associated with the first PSD resource by a value of
8 the second stamp;
9 increasing the second value associated with the first PSD resource by the value
10 of the second stamp; and
11 generating the information for printing the second indicium using the first
12 PSD resource.

1 14. The method of claim 12 wherein generating the information for
2 printing the second indicium comprises:
3 selecting the first server system from the plurality of server systems of the
4 postage vendor system to generate the information for printing the second indicium;
5 selecting a second postal security device (PSD) resource from the plurality of
6 PSD resources stored by the postage vendor system for generating the information for
7 printing the second indicium;
8 decreasing a first value associated with the second PSD resource by a value of
9 the second stamp;
10 increasing a second value associated with the second PSD resource by the
11 value of the second stamp; and
12 generating the information for printing the second indicium using the second
13 PSD resource.

1 15. The method of claim 7 wherein generating the information for printing
2 the second indicium comprises:
3 selecting a second server system from the plurality of server systems of the
4 postage vendor system to generate the information for printing the second indicium; and
5 generating the information for printing the second indicium using the second
6 server system.

16. A method of dispensing postage comprising:
providing a first system comprising a web server and a processing server;
associating a single postal license assigned by a postal authority with the first system;
receiving, at the web server, a request from a second system to purchase a stamp;
in response to the request, generating, using the processing server, information for printing an indicium corresponding to the stamp based upon the single postal license associated with the first system; and
communicating the information for printing the indicium from the first system to the second system.

17. In an environment comprising a plurality of user systems and a postage vendor system comprising a plurality of servers, a method of dispensing postage comprising:
associating a license number assigned by a postal authority with the postage vendor system;
at the postage vendor system:
receiving a plurality of requests from the plurality of user systems requesting purchase of postage; and
in response to the plurality of requests, generating information for printing indicia corresponding to the plurality of requests using the single license number associated with the postage vendor system; and
communicating the information for printing the indicia from the postage vendor system to the plurality of user systems.

18. A method of purchasing postage comprising:
transmitting a first request to purchase a first stamp from a first data processing system located at a first address to a postage vendor system coupled to the first data processing system, the postage vendor system comprising a plurality of servers;
receiving, at the first data processing system, information for printing a first indicium corresponding to the first stamp from the postage vendor system; and
printing the first indicium at the first data processing system based upon the information for printing the first indicium received from the postage vendor system.

19. The method of claim 18 further comprising:
transmitting a second request to purchase a second stamp from a second data processing system located at a second address different from the first address to the postage vendor system;
receiving, at the second data processing system, information for printing a second indicium corresponding to the second stamp from the postage vendor system; and
printing the second indicium at the second data processing system based upon the information for printing the second indicium received from the postage vendor system.

20. A method of dispensing postage comprising:
at a postage vendor system:
receiving a first request from a first user system requesting purchase of a first stamp and a second request from a second user system requesting purchase of a second stamp;
selecting a first postal security device (PSD) resource from a plurality of PSD resources stored by the postage vendor system;
decreasing a first value associated with the first PSD resource by a value of the first stamp;
increasing a second value associated with the first PSD resource by the value of the first stamp;
generating information for printing a first indicium corresponding to the first stamp;
decreasing the first value associated with the first PSD resource by a value of the second stamp;
increasing the second value associated with the first PSD resource by the value of the second stamp; and
generating information for printing a second indicium corresponding to the second stamp;
communicating the information for printing the first indicium from the postage vendor system to the first user system; and
communicating the information for printing the second indicium from the postage vendor system to the second user system.

1 21. A system for dispensing postage comprising:
2 a communication network;
3 a plurality of data processing systems coupled to the communication network,
4 the plurality of data processing systems including a first data processing system and a second
5 data processing system; and
6 a postage vendor system coupled to the communication network, the postage
7 vendor system comprising a plurality of server systems and a database, a single license
8 number assigned by a postal authority associated with the postage vendor system,
9 wherein the postage vendor system is configured to:
10 receive a first request from the first data processing system requesting
11 purchase of a first stamp;
12 receive a second request from a second data processing system
13 requesting purchase of a second stamp;
14 in response to the first request, generate information for printing a first
15 indicium corresponding to the first stamp based upon the single license number associated
16 with the postage vendor system;
17 in response to the second request, generate information for printing a
18 second indicium corresponding to the second stamp based upon the single license number
19 associated with the postage vendor system;
20 communicate the information for printing the first indicium from the
21 postage vendor system to the first data processing system; and
22 communicate the information for printing the second indicium from
23 the postage vendor system to the second data processing system.

1 22. The system of claim 21 wherein the first data processing system is
2 configured to print the first indicium based upon the information for printing the first
3 indicium received from the postage vendor system.

1 23. The system of claim 22 wherein:
2 the first request includes information identifying a medium on which the first
3 indicium is to be printed;
4 the postage vendor system is configured to generate the information for
5 printing the first indicium corresponding to the first stamp by:

6 validating the information identifying the medium on which the first
7 indicium is to be printed; and
8 generating the information for printing the first indicium only if the
9 information identifying the medium on which the first indicium is to be printed is determined
10 by the postage vendor system to be valid; and
11 the first data processing system is configured to print the first indicium on the
12 medium.

1 24. The system of claim 23 wherein the medium on which the first
2 indicium is printed is a label and the information identifying the medium is a serial number
3 associated with the label.

1 25. The system of claim 23 wherein the medium on which the first
2 indicium is printed is a label from a sheet of labels and the information identifying the
3 medium is a serial number associated with the sheet of labels.

1 26. The system of claim 22 wherein:
2 the first request includes information identifying a first user and credit-card
3 information; and
4 the postage vendor system is configured to generate the information for
5 printing the first indicium corresponding to the first stamp by:
6 validating the information identifying the first user and the credit-card
7 information; and
8 generating the information for printing the first indicium only if the
9 information identifying the first user and the credit-card information is determined by the
10 postage vendor system to be valid.

1 27. The system of claim 21 wherein the plurality of server systems of the
2 postage vendor system includes a first server system,
3 wherein the first server system is configured to:
4 receive the first request;
5 select a second server from the plurality of server systems to generate
6 the information for printing the first indicium; and
7 wherein the second server system is configured to generate the information for
8 printing the first indicium.

1 28. The system of claim 27 wherein the database is configured to store a
2 list of server systems which may be used to generate information for printing the first
3 indicium, and the first server system is configured to select the second server system from the
4 list of server systems by applying a selection procedure.

1 29. The system of claim 28 wherein the selection procedure comprises a
2 round-robin selection procedure.

1 30. The system of claim 27 wherein the second server system is coupled to
2 a cryptographic module configured to generate a digital signature, and the second server is
3 configured to include the digital signature in the information for printing the first indicium.

1 31. The system of claim 27 wherein in order to generate the information
2 for printing the first indicium the second server system is configured to:

3 select a first postal security device (PSD) resource from a plurality of PSD
4 resources stored by the postage vendor system;

5 determine if funds associated with the first PSD resource are at least equal to
6 the value of the first stamp;

7 add funds to the funds associated with the first PSD resource if the funds
8 associated with the first PSD resource are less than the value of the first stamp;; and

9 generate the information for printing the first indicium using the first PSD
10 resource.

1 32. The system of claim 27 wherein in order to generate the information
2 for printing the first indicium the second server system is configured to:

3 select a first postal security device (PSD) resource from a plurality of PSD
4 resources stored by the postage vendor system;

5 decrease a first value associated with the first PSD resource by a value of the
6 first stamp;

7 increase a second value associated with the first PSD resource by the value of
8 the first stamp; and

9 generate the information for printing the first indicium using the first PSD
10 resource.

33. The system of claim 32 wherein:
the first server system is configured to:
receive the second request;
select the second server from the plurality of server systems to
generate the information for printing the second indicium; and
the second server system is configured to:
select the first postal security device (PSD) resource for generating the
information for printing the second indicium;
decrease the first value associated with the first PSD resource by a
value of the second stamp;
increase the second value associated with the first PSD resource by the
value of the second stamp; and
generate the information for printing the second indicium using the
first PSD resource.

34. The system of claim 32 wherein:
the first server system is configured to:
receive the second request; and
select the second server from the plurality of server systems to
generate the information for printing the second indicium; and
the second server system is configured to:
select a second postal security device (PSD) resource from the plurality
of PSD resources stored by the postage vendor system for generating the information for
printing the second indicium;
decrease a first value associated with the second PSD resource by a
value of the second stamp;
increase a second value associated with the second PSD resource by
the value of the second stamp; and
generate the information for printing the second indicium using the
second PSD resource.

35. The system of claim 27 wherein:
the first server system is configured to:
receive the second request;

select a third server from the plurality of server systems to generate the information for printing the second indicium; and
wherein the third server system is configured to generate the information for printing the second indicium.

36. A system of dispensing postage comprising:
a first system comprising a web server and a processing server; and
a second system coupled to the first system via a communication network;
wherein a single postal license assigned by a postal authority is associated with the first system;
wherein the web server is configured to receive a request from the second system to purchase a stamp;
wherein in response to the request, the processing server is configured to generate information for printing an indicium corresponding to the stamp based upon the single postal license associated with the first system; and
wherein the first system is configured to communicate the information for printing the indicium to the second system.

37. A system for dispensing postage comprising:
a postage vendor system comprising a plurality of server systems; and
a plurality of user systems coupled to the postage vendor system via a communication network;
wherein a single postal license assigned by a postal authority is associated with the first system;
wherein the postage vendor system is configured to:
receive a plurality of requests from the plurality of user systems requesting purchase of postage;
in response to the plurality of requests, generate information for printing indicia corresponding to the plurality of requests using the single postal license associated with the postage vendor system; and
communicate the information for printing the indicia to the plurality of user systems.

38. A system for purchasing postage comprising:
a postage vendor system comprising a plurality of servers; and
a first data processing system located at a first address and coupled to the
postage vendor system via a communication network;
wherein the first data processing system is configured to:
transmit a first request to purchase a first stamp to the postage vendor
system;
receive information for printing a first indicium corresponding to the
first stamp from the postage vendor system; and
print the first indicium based upon the information for printing the first
indiciu received from the postage vendor system.

39. The system of claim 38 further comprising:
a second data processing system located at a second address different from the
first address and coupled to the postage vendor system via a communication network
wherein the second data processing system is configured to:
transmit a second request to purchase a second stamp to the postage
vendor system;
receive information for printing a second indicium corresponding to
the second stamp from the postage vendor system; and
print the second indicium based upon the information for printing the
second indicium received from the postage vendor system.

40. A system for dispensing postage comprising:
a postage vendor system;
a first user system coupled to the postage vendor system via a communication
network; and
a first user system coupled to the postage vendor system via a communication
network;
wherein the postage vendor system is configured to:
receive a first request from the first user system requesting purchase of
a first stamp;
receive a second request from the second user system requesting
purchase of a second stamp;

select a first postal security device (PSD) resource from a plurality of
PSD resources stored by the postage vendor system;
decrease a first value associated with the first PSD resource by a value
of the first stamp;
increase a second value associated with the first PSD resource by the
value of the first stamp;
generate information for printing a first indicium corresponding to the
first stamp;
decrease the first value associated with the first PSD resource by a
value of the second stamp;
increase the second value associated with the first PSD resource by the
value of the second stamp;
generate information for printing a second indicium corresponding to
the second stamp;
communicate the information for printing the first indicium to the first
user system; and
communicate the information for printing the second indicium to the
second user system.

41. A computer program product stored on a computer-readable medium
for dispensing postage in a network environment comprising a plurality of user systems
coupled to a postage vendor system, the postage vendor system comprising a plurality of
server systems, the computer program product comprising:
code for receiving a first request from a first user system from the plurality of
user systems requesting purchase of a first stamp;
code for receiving a second request from a second user system from the
plurality of user systems requesting purchase of a second stamp;
in response to the first request, code for generating information for printing a
first indicium corresponding to the first stamp based upon a single license number assigned
by a postal authority and associated with the postage vendor system;
in response to the second request, code for generating information for printing
a second indicium corresponding to the second stamp based upon the single license number
associated with the postage vendor system;

code for communicating the information for printing the first indicium from the postage vendor system to the first user system; and
code for communicating the information for printing the second indicium from the postage vendor system to the second user system.

42. The computer program product of claim 41 further comprising code for printing the first indicium at the first user system based upon the information for printing the first indicium received from the postage vendor system.

43. The computer program product of claim 42 wherein:
the first request includes information identifying a medium on which the first indicium is to be printed;

the code for generating the information for printing the first indicium corresponding to the first stamp comprises:

code for validating the information identifying the medium on which the first indicium is to be printed; and

code for generating the information for printing the first indicium only if the information identifying the medium on which the first indicium is to be printed is determined by the postage vendor system to be valid; and

the code for printing the first indicium comprises code for printing the first indicium on the medium.

44. The computer program product of claim 43 wherein the medium on which the first indicium is printed is a label and the information identifying the medium is a serial number associated with the label.

45. The computer program product of claim 43 wherein the medium on which the first indicium is printed is a label from a sheet of labels and the information identifying the medium is a serial number associated with the sheet of labels.

46. The computer program product of claim 42 wherein:
the first request includes information identifying a first user and credit-card information; and

the code for generating the information for printing a first indicium corresponding to the first stamp comprises:

code for validating the information identifying the first user and the credit-card information; and

code for generating the information for printing the first indicium only if the information identifying the first user and the credit-card information is determined by the postage vendor system to be valid.

47. The computer program product of claim 41 wherein the code for generating the information for printing the first indicium comprises:
code for selecting a first server system from the plurality of server systems of the postage vendor system to generate the information for printing the first indicium; and
code for generating the information for printing the first indicium using the first server system.

48. The computer program product of claim 47 wherein the code for selecting the first server system from the plurality of server systems comprises:
code for selecting the first server system from a list of server systems which may be used to generate information for printing the first indicium according to a selection procedure.

49. The computer program product of claim 48 wherein the selection procedure comprises a round-robin selection procedure.

50. The computer program product of claim 47 wherein the code for generating the information for printing the first indicium using the first server system comprises:
code for generating a digital signature using a cryptographic module associated with the first server system; and
code for including the digital signature in the information for printing the first indicium.

51. The computer program product of claim 47 wherein the code for generating the information for printing the first indicium using the first server system comprises:
code for selecting a first postal security device (PSD) resource from a plurality of PSD resources stored by the postage vendor system;

code for determining if funds associated with the first PSD resource are at least equal to the value of the first stamp;
if it is determined that the funds associated with the first PSD resource are less than the value of the first stamp, code for adding funds to the funds associated with the first PSD resource; and
code for generating the information for printing the first indicium using the first PSD resource.

52. The computer program product of claim 47 wherein the code for generating the information for printing the first indicium using the first server system comprises:

code for selecting a first postal security device (PSD) resource from a plurality of PSD resources stored by the postage vendor system;
code for decreasing a first value associated with the first PSD resource by a value of the first stamp;
code for increasing a second value associated with the first PSD resource by the value of the first stamp; and
code for generating the information for printing the first indicium using the first PSD resource.

53. The computer program product of claim 52 wherein the code for generating the information for printing the second indicium comprises:

code for selecting the first server system from the plurality of server systems of the postage vendor system to generate the information for printing the second indicium;
code for selecting the first postal security device (PSD) resource for generating the information for printing the second indicium;
code for decreasing the first value associated with the first PSD resource by a value of the second stamp;
code for increasing the second value associated with the first PSD resource by the value of the second stamp; and
code for generating the information for printing the second indicium using the first PSD resource.

1 54. The computer program product of claim 52 wherein the code for
2 generating the information for printing the second indicium comprises:
3 code for selecting the first server system from the plurality of server systems
4 of the postage vendor system to generate the information for printing the second indicium;
5 code for selecting a second postal security device (PSD) resource from the
6 plurality of PSD resources stored by the postage vendor system for generating the
7 information for printing the second indicium;
8 code for decreasing a first value associated with the second PSD resource by a
9 value of the second stamp;
10 code for increasing a second value associated with the second PSD resource
11 by the value of the second stamp; and
12 code for generating the information for printing the second indicium using the
13 second PSD resource.

1 55. The computer program product of claim 47 wherein the code for
2 generating the information for printing the second indicium comprises:
3 code for selecting a second server system from the plurality of server systems
4 of the postage vendor system to generate the information for printing the second indicium;
5 and
6 code for generating the information for printing the second indicium using the
7 second server system.

1 56. A computer program product stored on a computer-readable medium
2 for dispensing postage using a first system coupled to a second system, the first system
3 comprising a web server and a processing server, the computer program product comprising:
4 code for associating a single postal license assigned by a postal authority with
5 the first system;
6 code for receiving, at the web server, a request from a second system to
7 purchase a stamp;
8 in response to the request, code for generating, using the processing server,
9 information for printing an indicium corresponding to the stamp based upon the single postal
10 license associated with the first system; and
11 code for communicating the information for printing the indicium from the
12 first system to the second system.

57. In an environment comprising a plurality of user systems and a postage vendor system comprising a plurality of servers, a computer program product stored on a computer-readable medium for dispensing postage comprising:

code for associating a license number assigned by a postal authority with the postage vendor system;

code for receiving, at the postage vendor system, a plurality of requests from the plurality of user systems requesting purchase of postage; and

code for in response to the plurality of requests, generating, at the postage vendor system, information for printing indicia corresponding to the plurality of requests using the single license number associated with the postage vendor system; and

code for communicating the information for printing the indicia from the postage vendor system to the plurality of user systems.

58. A computer program product stored on a computer-readable medium for purchasing postage comprising:

code for transmitting a first request to purchase a first stamp from a first data processing system located at a first address to a postage vendor system coupled to the first data processing system, the postage vendor system comprising a plurality of servers;

code for receiving, at the first data processing system, information for printing a first indicium corresponding to the first stamp from the postage vendor system; and

code for printing the first indicium at the first data processing system based upon the information for printing the first indicium received from the postage vendor system.

59. The computer program product of claim 58 further comprising:

code for transmitting a second request to purchase a second stamp from a second data processing system located at a second address different from the first address to the postage vendor system;

code for receiving, at the second data processing system, information for printing a second indicium corresponding to the second stamp from the postage vendor system; and

code for printing the second indicium at the second data processing system based upon the information for printing the second indicium received from the postage vendor system.

60. A computer program product stored on a computer-readable medium for dispensing postage comprising:

- code for receiving a first request from a first user system requesting purchase of a first stamp and a second request from a second user system requesting purchase of a second stamp;
- code for selecting a first postal security device (PSD) resource from a plurality of PSD resources;
- code for decreasing a first value associated with the first PSD resource by a value of the first stamp;
- code for increasing a second value associated with the first PSD resource by the value of the first stamp;
- code for generating information for printing a first indicium corresponding to the first stamp;
- code for decreasing the first value associated with the first PSD resource by a value of the second stamp;
- code for increasing the second value associated with the first PSD resource by the value of the second stamp; and
- code for generating information for printing a second indicium corresponding to the second stamp;
- code for communicating the information for printing the first indicium to the first user system; and
- code for communicating the information for printing the second indicium to the second user system.